



Welcome Words for your 3 - 3^{1/2} Year Old

Starting Preschool

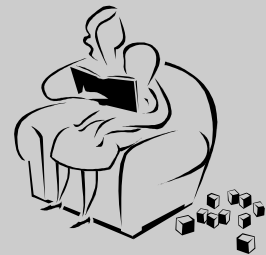
If your child is starting preschool or new daycare, you may be surprised to find her cheerful excitement turn to tears when you say goodbye. For most children, these tears are short-lived. As one preschool teacher put it, "The child's fine in just a few minutes -- the parent suffers all morning."

It's hard to leave a tearful, clinging child, but if her teachers reassure you that the crying ends quickly, chances are there's nothing to worry about. Here are some tips that may help ease her transition:

- Allow enough time to wake up and get ready without rushing. A relaxed start will help.
- Take along a friend -- a stuffed toy (or a blanket) can help her face a room full of new children.
- Send along extra support -- a photo of you, a picture you drew, a special sticker that says "I Love You."
- Wear a smile and talk about positives: what she might have for snack, what activities she can look forward to, a new friend, the playground.
- Get there early enough to avoid the rush of other kids. The teacher will have more time to help her ease into the morning. If you can, spend a little time visiting the classroom. This may or may not help your child; if it seems to make it harder, leave promptly.
- Say goodbye in a cheerful voice, telling her when you'll be back (after the playground or after lunch). Wave and then don't look back. If you need reassurance, call the preschool within the hour and check with her teachers.
- Be sure to be back on time for pick up. Waiting for you can seem like an eternity and add to her anxiety about being at preschool.
- If your child develops new problems with eating or sleeping, seems miserable when picked up, and/or seems generally unhappy and these problems persist, don't ignore them. The preschool (or daycare) may not be a good match for your child.

At 3 1/2 ,

- I enjoy books and new words.
- I am independent, wanting to "do it myself."
- I am emotionally insecure.
- I may develop new fears, including a fear of heights.
- I often say "no" to requests.
- I may exclude others and develop a "best friend."
- I am uncoordinated and may stumble or fall.
- I may stutter.
- I may increase habits such as thumb sucking or nail biting.
- I may still not be dry through the night.



Give me

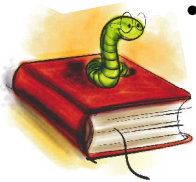
- read aloud books. I'll ask lots of questions, so please be patient with my interruptions!
- supervised play with a friend.
- nests of boxes or cans.
- rope and string.
- toy animals.
- materials for playing house, store or train.
- balls.
- cloth books with pages for lacing.
- music making instruments (drum, tambourine, triangle).
- dress-up clothes and hats.
- blocks.

A Foundation for Learning

What should you do to prepare your 3-year-old for school? Relax and enjoy her. Rather than trying to teach her the alphabet, encourage her curiosity and interests, which may mean catching frogs or finger-painting and reading about stories.

Here are some ways you can support your child's learning:

- Reading aloud is consistently cited as the best insurance for school success. One study showed that preschoolers average one question every 2.26 minutes during a story. Take the time to answer your child's questions. The time you spend talking is more important than finishing the book.
- Give simple answers. If your child asks, "Why is the sun shining?" the answer, "So the trees and flowers will grow," is probably all she needs to know. If you can't come up with an answer that satisfies her, tell her you'll go together to find a book at the library. Ask the children's librarian for suggestions.
- Recognizing her name. Help her learn to recognize her name by posting it in block letters on her bedroom door, in her books, and on a T-shirt. If she's interested in letters, she may enjoy singing the ABCs, eating alphabet soup.
- Numbers and shapes. It's easy to introduce counting to five or 10 in everyday activities, whether you're picking up blocks, climbing steps, or counting fingers and toes. Help her recognize shapes by cutting sandwiches or toast into circles, triangles, squares and rectangles.
- Create together. Often children will spend more time at creative activities if a parent joins them. Create with your child using finger-paints, crayons, clay, and blunt scissors and paper. When she shows you her masterpiece, be specific with your appreciation and interest: "It looks like you used mostly red, tell me about the blue part."



- Introduce science by asking your child to find out "What happens if . . . you pour sand from a big cup into a small cup? You pour water into a sieve and into a pan? Follow your child's interests and let her set the pace. Children whose learning is rushed—may lack self-motivation and develop early burnout.

Time to Reduce Stress

Stress is nearly certain to go up when your child is going through a period of disequilibrium, whether this occurs at the predicted age of 3 1/2 or sooner (or later).

- When stress happens, make time to take stock of your lifestyle. This may be a good time to simplify your lives, using stress to create success.
- If you're over-committed, cut back. Learn to say, "I'll think about it" when people ask you to do things. After thinking it over, don't agree unless you really do have time and 2) will enjoy the task.
- Don't over-schedule your child. One organized activity is plenty; none are necessary for her health or happiness.
- Make exercise part of every day. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, eat a light lunch and go for a walk, work out with a video at home, take an exercise class, or jump rope while your child plays in the sandbox.
- Breathe deeply. If you know a relaxation technique from a childbirth class, use it now, or make up your own. Breathe slowly and deeply.
- Treat yourself. What makes you smile? A date with your partner? A movie with a friend? Make a list of favorites and indulge regularly.
- Talk about it. Welcome Baby can suggest places to meet other parents. Call 560-7150.

Challenges times 3 (and a half!)

Be realistic about this age: don't expect your child to behave in ideal ways or anticipate that daily routines will go well. Trust that she will become easier to manage.

- ◆ Listening to your child's frustrations and restating her feelings, lets her know you care: "This is very important to you" or "You sound really upset." She may be ready to move on or she may need some time alone.
- ◆ Support her through her fears. If she's afraid of heights, hold her hand; if she wants you to go outside with her, go without making a fuss about how she used to go out alone.
- ◆ Use humor to get around fears about a lack of wholeness. If her cookie is broken, suggest she take another bite and make it look like a crescent moon.
- ◆ Try to keep difficult situations (you'll soon know what these are) to a minimum. If family mealtime is becoming a battleground, feed her earlier and don't stick around to watch what gets eaten (or how). There will be better times for learning etiquette.
- ◆ Don't take protests of "I hate you" seriously. Reflect back her feelings: "You're pretty mad at me." Reassure her that you love her and try to find a diversion. Rather than engage in a battle of wills, divert her attention: "Let's see how fast we can pick up these blocks." Or, try whispering a request in her ear rather than using your normal voice.
- ◆ Determine if a warning helps or makes her more anxious. Some children respond better if they know what's coming up; others prefer not to know.
- ◆ If your child stutters, don't correct her or complete a sentence for her. Research shows it's best to help her relax by giving her plenty of time to speak. Respond with a calm and patient tone of voice.